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ABSTRACT

This study sought to ascertain how the press covers higher education and how public research universities work with the press to advance their agendas. It examined the coverage that eight newspapers devoted to six public research universities, namely the Universities of Pittsburgh, Colorado (Boulder), Minnesota, California (Berkeley), and California (San Diego), as well as Ohio State University and the University of California System Office. The study also interviewed newspaper and university officials regarding press coverage of higher education and specific institutions. The results indicated the differing roles that the newspapers had in regard to their coverage of the local university, focusing on reportage in regard to consumer advising, policing the university, window on the university, higher education politics, higher education trends, and social trends. The results compared the differing editorial policies of the newspapers in regard to news balance, thresholds of evidence for claims of wrongdoing, community expectations, use of informants, and "puff" pieces. (Contains 73 references.) (MDM)

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The Press as a Policy Actor and Agent of Social Control and the Efforts of Universities to Negotiate Press Performance

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HE 028 861

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This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Marriott Hotel, Orlando, Florida, November 2-5, 1995. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

1. PROBLEM STATEMENT

This study was conducted in response to recent state-level, educational policy research using policy models that expand the cast of relevant policy actors beyond the traditional tight-knit group of educational institutions, elected officials, and interest groups to include issues champions outside of government, academic researchers, and newspaper reporters (Hearn & Griswold, 1994; Mazzoni, 1991). These policy models were developed by political scientists (Kingdon, 1984; Sabatier 1988, 1991) and sociologists (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988) who have concluded that journalists are active participants within policy communities.

The press is a vital constituency within higher education policy circles. Policy entrepreneurs at the California Higher Education Policy Center, Pew Higher Education Roundtable, and Wingspread Group on Higher Education, seek press coverage to mobilize support for their reform agendas. State higher education coordinating boards seek press coverage to underwrite their agendas (Callan & Mingle, 1988). College and university presidents view public relations as a major part of their responsibilities and they regard the news media as having a significant influence on perceptions of their institutions (Theuss, 1993, Williams).

Newspaper reporters do not merely reflect the efforts of policy actors to effect reform in higher education, they are actively involved themselves as social-control agents. Reporters, for example, have conducted their own studies of faculty workloads (Mingle, 1993). The policing of higher education relates to the fourth-estate role of the press. In this role, reporters sometimes act intentionally to effect social-control processes in the organizations they report on by policing for procedural strays, violations of expectations, and signs of moral disorder (Ericson,

Baranek, & Chan, 1987).

It is unclear which newspapers are likely to adopt the fourth-estate role. Research on how newspapers cover higher education and what factors influence their coverage is scarce. Most studies on press coverage of higher education have not examined this question. They have focused mostly on reporters' views about public relations administrators (Caroll, 1992; Lace, 1988; Murray 1991; Stegall & Saunders, 1985). Chance's (1993) study on press coverage of California higher education is an exception. He found that newspaper editors' affinity for the University of California system discouraged reporters from covering the university critically.

One aim of this study was to ascertain how the press covers higher education. The study focused on metropolitan newspapers - those with circulations over 250,000 - and their coverage of the public research university within their readership area. The study sought to determine the extent to which reporters and editors subscribe to the fourth-estate role and to determine what factors inside and outside the newsroom encourage or discourage them from adopting this role.

The second aim of this study was to explain how public research universities work with press. Public research universities seek press coverage to demonstrate public accountability and avoid press coverage that intrudes into their private regions. To ensure that their public face is covered and their private face remains under cover, university administrators selectively use tactics of enclosure and disclosure to limit reporters' access to knowledge about their institutions (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1989).

2. THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Role Theory

To determine how reporters and editors cover higher education and the factors that influence their coverage, the study used role theory as its theoretical framework (Stryker & Statham, 1985). It has been used in a number of studies and analytical treatments of reporters and editors (Berkowitz, 1992; Fico, 1985; Parsons, Finnegan, & Benham, 1988). Defining role as the behavioral expectations for what a reporter should do (Zurcher, 1983), the study examined the influence of four broad categories of expectations: individual, organizational, professional, and community. Individual expectations relate to reporters' role identity, specifically, how they make their work interesting, their preferences for using their skills, and their sources of satisfaction (McCall & Simmons, 1978). Reporters' roles were analyzed from the perspective of interactional role theory, which views reporters as modifying and creating role expectations to reflect their role identity rather than simply conforming to external expectations (Zurcher, 1983). Organizational expectations relate to editors' expectations of reporters in regards to story selection, treatment, and production quotas (Berkowitz, 1992). Professional expectations pertain to ethical and craft-oriented concerns, standards of quality, and the proper conduct of news personnel (Berkowitz, 1992). Community expectations vary with the particular needs of a community. Tichenor, Olien, and Donohue examined the influence of community expectations on newspapers and found that newspapers are not the "independent, self-styled social agents that either they or members of the public imagine them to be" (1980, p. 217). Rather, editors' expectations for their reporters reflected the expectations of the dominant power grouping in a community.

Community expectations may be communicated to reporters and editors through their contact with community elites, news sources, readers, friends, and neighbors.

2.2 Regions and Closure Model

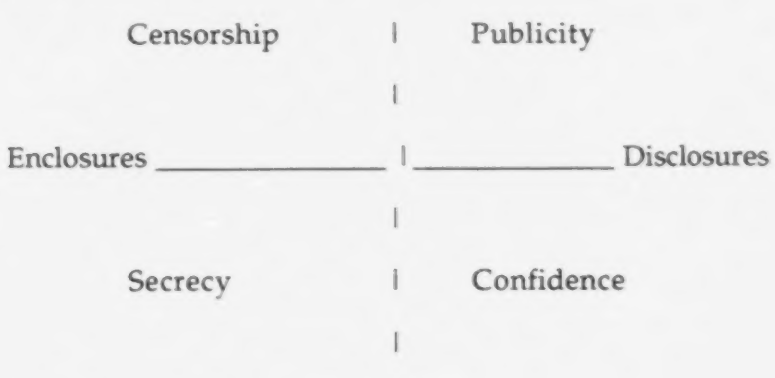
Universities must have the confidence of their environments to be in exchange with them and receive the resources that provide for their success and stability (Meyer & Rowan, 1978, p. 107). To create an aura of confidence and minimize inspection and control, universities decouple themselves from their environments by engaging in what Goffman (1967) calls "face work" (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, 1978). Face work is the process of using face-saving procedures, such as avoidance and discretion, to prevent disruptions and avoid public embarrassments (Meyer & Rowan, 1978, p. 102).

Much of the process of saving face involves struggles over the control of newspaper accounts. Like all organizations, universities try to keep their public face in the news and their private face under cover (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1989, p. 25). Newspapers may not be content with confining their coverage to the public face of universities. They may try to lift the "veil of administrative decency" and police the private regions of universities for evidence of internal problems and disorder (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1989 p. 21).

Conscious of the ambitions of newspapers, universities engage in work to protect themselves against intrusion while also achieving favorable publicity. To examine how organizations accomplish this work, Ericson, Baranek, and Chan developed a model derived from Goffman's (1959) research on individuals'

preservation and presentation of self. The model identifies two regions, front and back, that distinguish the public and private spaces of organizations, and it identifies two processes of regulating knowledge, enclosure and disclosure, that distinguish efforts to seal off or release knowledge (see figure 1). *Secrecy* consists of those efforts to seal off the release of knowledge in the back regions of an organization. *Confidence* represents those efforts to disclose knowledge in the back regions of an organization. *Censorship* consists of those efforts intended to create the impression that an organization is disclosing while it is actually enclosing on what is publicized. *Publicity* represents efforts to disclose information in the public regions of an organization.

Figure 1: Regions and Closures



Source: Ericson, Baranek, and Chan, 1989.

The regions and closures model was used in this study to examine how universities control the release of knowledge to suit their purposes. It looked at their public and private regions and their strategies and tactics for enclosing and disclosing knowledge. It also described how reporters responded to these methods.

3. DATA SOURCES AND RESEARCH METHODS

The study employed a comparative case study methodology (Yin, 1994). The cases consisted of eight newspapers and six public research universities. A moderate number of cases allowed for an in-depth study of each case, yet also enabled cross-comparisons to be made. The newspapers were selected to construct a sample of newspapers that were diverse in their coverage of public research universities. Newspaper articles were reviewed to identify newspapers whose coverage probed the back regions of universities and those that did not. In addition, the sample included newspapers that were in one-newspaper towns and two-newspaper towns to see what effects competition had on coverage. The newspapers and universities that participated in the study are displayed in Table 1.

TABLE 1. SITE VISITS IN STUDY ON NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF UNIVERSITIES

Newspaper	Interviews	University	Interviews
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette	8	University of Pittsburgh	3
Columbus Dispatch	3	Ohio State University	3
Rocky Mountain News	5	University of Colorado, Boulder	3
Denver Post	3		
Minneapolis Star Tribune	7	University of Minnesota	4
San Francisco Examiner	4	Univ. of California, Berkeley	2
San Francisco Chronicle	4	Univ. of California System Office	2
San Diego Union-Tribune	8	Univ. of California, San Diego	3

The study's primary source of data came from interviews guided by a common protocol of open-ended questions. In total, 57 reporters, editors, and university administrators were interviewed for this study. To conduct the

interviews, four- to five-day visits were made to each location. The reporters included higher education and investigative reporters. Higher education reporters are charged with covering the operations of colleges and universities. With the possible exception of investigative reporters, higher education reporters are the reporters most likely to function as a policy actor and agent of social control. The editors included assigning editors and, in some cases, metro, city, and executive editors. The university administrators worked in university units responsible for media relations. Where appropriate, administrators and faculty who reporters used as news sources and science, medical, and business reporters were interviewed to collect contextual data and to cross-check accounts. Most of the interviews were tape recorded with the consent of the interviewees and transcribed. Consent forms were used to explain the intent of the study and to provide the interviewees the option to indicate whether they wished their identity to remain private or whether they could be identified in any publication originating from this study.

To ensure the validity of communication and to reduce the likelihood of misinterpreting data, triangulating of multiple sources of data occurred (Denzin, 1989; Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Data for the study included several interviews at each case site along with observer notes, documents, and publications. Additional data included reporters' newspaper articles from 1994 and the first quarter of 1995 pulled from the Nexis/Lexis system - an electronic database with full-text versions of newspapers.

While the study relied on multiple interviews for cross-checks, participant observation would have been a more effective, yet more time consuming, method to identify deceptions, exaggerations, and distortions that characterize interviews

(Denzin, 1989). With the comfort of knowing that the researcher will not observe their behavior, interviewees may rationalize or exaggerate their accounts with few regrets. To effectively cross-check accounts, many interviewees were interviewed on more than one occasion in the course of site visits. In addition, interviewees were asked to express concepts and opinions in terms of specific events and to provide examples to illustrate their points.

Data from the study were content analyzed using qualitative procedures, notably through an iterative process of displaying and analyzing the text in terms of the theoretical constructs of role theory and the theoretical framework of regions and enclosures (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The study used the qualitative data analysis software package NUD•IST to store, code, index, and analyze data from the interviews. Newspaper articles were analyzed in terms of topics, news sources cited, role of new sources, and origin of the story. In several cases, informants were contacted a second time to test out provisional findings.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Newspaper Coverage of Public Research Universities

A summary of the universities' coverage in 1994 is shown in Table 2. The universities were mentioned in every section of each newspaper. They provided news for sports, performing arts, health, medicine, and science reporters. They were visible in the local news, including the stories of police, court, county, state and neighborhood reporters. Their faculty were used as experts for national news stories. Their business faculty commented on local economic trends for business reporters. They were mentioned in editorials, opinion columns, and letters to the editor.

Table 2 Articles Published in 1994 By Newspaper and Type of Article

Paper (University)	Total	Hi Ed	Univ.	Sci.	Bus.	Sports	Life	Local	Edit.	State
Columbus Dispatch (Ohio State)	3,873	198	121	64	229	1,437	604	413	182	58
San Francisco Chronicle (California Berkeley)	1,341	76	54	55	44	602	93	210	70	32
San Diego Union-Tribune (California San Diego)	2,068	231	65	64	73	126	277	277		
Minneapolis Star Tribune (Minnesota)	2,651	109	62	106	171	1,647	466	362	103	48
Denver Post (Colorado)	1,175	159	77	26	110	442	176	189	27	15
Rocky Mountain News (Colorado)	1,358	179	112	107	67	582	175	196	103	33
Pittsburgh Post Gazette (Pittsburgh)	1,576	105	61	177	49	1,237	181	230	118	25

Note. Total = total number of stories mentioning university, including incidental mentions such as wedding announcement or obituaries. Hi Ed = stories written by higher education reporters. Univ. = stories written by higher education reporters mentioning university. Sci. = stories written by science and medicine writers mentioning university. Bus.: stories written by business writers mentioning university. Sports: stories written by sports writers mentioning university. Life: stories written lifestyle, theater, arts, drama, entertainment, variety writers mentioning university. Local: stories written by general assignment, police, county, city, court writers, and writers using faculty as expert sources mentioning university. Edit: number of editorials, opinion columns, or letters to the editor mentioning the university. State: stories written by state government writers mentioning university. Source: Keyword search on Nexis-Lexis Database.

The stories of higher education reporters represent just one segment of the total coverage that universities receive (see Hi Ed column). A half to two thirds of their stories concerned their local public research university (see Univ column) and the remainder dealt with other institutions in their community.

Usually, one reporter is assigned to higher education. Two newspapers in this study had two reporters assigned to higher education, but they have since gone back to one. Depending on the number of colleges and universities surrounding a

newspaper, it can be extremely difficult for one reporter to adequately cover each institution. Most reporters indicated that community and state colleges get short shrift in favor of the local research university. A reporter at the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* explained why he covers the University of Minnesota:

"That's where the action is. That's where the high competition is. That's where the battles are. The editors in general, it's what they play, it's what they give you feedback on, it's what they talk to you about. They don't talk to you much about the state universities or the community colleges or the technical colleges, even though those institutions have far more enrollment that the University of Minnesota."

Reporters and editors gravitate to universities because of their stature and attraction to readers. A reporter at the *San Francisco Chronicle* commented:

"Berkeley is not San Francisco State because Berkeley has the Ph.D. programs and it has incredible faculty. San Francisco State just isn't the same. It's just not a put down but it's a different animal and you could make a good case that we don't write enough about these places. It's kind of a chicken and egg problem: we think readers are more interested in high profile places, so we focus on those more, but maybe they are more interesting because we write about them more. Having said that, even if we wrote about the community colleges, people would want to know about what is happening at UC Berkeley, because everyone's kid wants to go to Berkeley."

4.2 Reporters' Role Orientations to Covering Higher Education

Reporters relied on role orientations to determine how they covered higher education. Role orientations are perspectives that reporters use to cover higher education. They function as a lens to single out stories from the sea of developments in higher education. They help reporters visualize who they should use as news sources. They influence how reporters frame and construct their stories.

It was not uncommon for reporters to have a repertoire of role orientations. Most reporters preferred one orientation over others. Their selection of the most salient orientation hinged on the support they received from others and the gratifications the reporters derived from performing it.

Six role orientations were identified. The *consumer advisor* role involves

writing stories to assist students and parents as consumer of higher education. The *policing* role entails seeking out evidence of events or practices that violate expectations or show signs of disorganization (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1987). The *window-to-the-university* role provides readers with a bottom-up view of what university life is like. The *politics* role entails covering the statewide milieu of higher education, including the funding, coordinating, and legislative environment. The *higher-education-trends-and-issues* role involves covering tends and issues in the administration of colleges and universities that affect a number of institutions or that are exemplified by an innovative institution. Lastly, the *social-and-cultural-trends-and-issues* role entails looking at universities as a microcosm of society's conflicts erupting along the lines of ethnicity, gender, and other distinctions people make in their social relations. Table 3 provides a summary of the importance reporters at the newspapers attached to the six role orientations. Role importance was categorized as either major, moderate, or minor based on how reporters described their roles and a review of their coverage. The classification of role orientations is best viewed as a tool to learn about reporters and their newspapers. Reporters' realities and experiences are far too complex and varied to fit neatly into any one role.

Table 3. Importance of Role Orientations of Reporters Covering Universities

Newspaper	Consumer Advisor	Policing Universities	Window to University	Politics of Hi Ed	Hi Ed Trends	Social Trends
Columbus Dispatch	Major	Minor	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Minor
Denver Post	Minor	Minor	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Major
Minneapolis Star Tribune	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Minor	Major	Major
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette	Moderate	Moderate	Minor	Minor	Moderate	Moder.
Rocky Mtn. News	Minor	Major	Minor	Major	Minor	Moder.
San Diego Union-Tribune	Major	Moderate	Major	Minor	Moderate	Moder.
San Francisco Chronicle	Minor	Moderate	Major	Minor	Major	Moder.
San Francisco Examiner	Minor	Major	Minor	Minor	Moderate	Moder.

Advisor to Consumers

"I wanted to bring to this beat sort of a consumer's viewpoint for a lot stories. I guess I use that as a gauge in how I pick my stories, that's one sort of test. I mean students, taxpayers, parents, these are all consumers of higher education in one way or another, they have a strong interest in it. The consumer viewpoint catches the broad base trends and issues either financial or curricular, new and different technology, or innovations in teaching." Reporter, *Columbus Dispatch*

Reporters often refer to higher education as a consumer story. This orientation is compatible with the journalistic truism that readers are always concerned about pocketbook issues. Using this orientation, the reporters wrote stories on how students select colleges, changes in admissions policies, tuition increases, new degree programs, financial aid, and paying for college. Every reporter monitored tuition levels and wrote stories whenever tuition rates were increased. A couple of reporters made it a point to write an annual story recapping

tuition levels at every college and university in their readership area.

The consumer orientation prompted the *Columbus Dispatch* reporter to redefine his news territory beyond Ohio State, which his predecessors had limited their coverage to. Realizing that future college students from Columbus attend institutions other than Ohio State, the reporter broadened the focus of his beat to include institutions throughout the region surrounding Columbus.

Policing Universities

"A reporter's job, at least part of your job, is to make sure the public is protected from excess secrecy, from intellectual or financial malfeasance, sloppiness, meanness, nondemocratic behavior. You have to be really questioning, and really suspicious of authority and of institutions to do that." Editor, *San Francisco Chronicle*

One of the common orientations of reporters is policing universities for improprieties. Working from this perspective, reporters seek out evidence of internal problems and visualize possibilities for their control. Internal problems include events or practices that violate expectations or show signs of disorganization (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1987). A story published in the *Rocky Mountain News* illustrates this form of reporting. The headline and first paragraph read:

Ball practice bounces French exam out of gym -
CU officials angry after simple scheduling error escalates into a 'fiasco.'

Jim Corbridge, chancellor of the University of Colorado-Boulder, had one word to describe a scheduling snafu Monday that forced the cancellation of a French exam in favor of a practice session for the women's basketball team. "Fiasco - that is the way I would describe it."

Reporters who police focus on what is out of order. Their stories tend to deal with three fundamental aspects of order: (1) *moral evaluation* - is something in or out of order based on whether it is "good, bad, healthy, unhealthy, normal,

abnormal, efficient, or inefficient;" (2) *procedural propriety* - is something moving along according to customary procedures; and (3) *hierarchy* - is something in order according to position, rank, status, or distinctions of quality (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1991, p. 5).

The reporters who police shared the basic aim of policing to achieve public accountability. Their stories focused mostly on how money is spent. The topic of money was often intertwined with imputations of mismanagement, excessive privileges, wasteful expenditures, conflicts of interest, and profiteering.

Reporters who police gravitate to money stories for two reasons. First and foremost, the journalism truism that readers care about how their tax money is spent comes into play. Second, covering money is a finely honed skill of reporters, a skill they can apply to various types of institutions with little knowledge of their mission or functions. An editor commented about his paper's goals in covering universities and the fact that his paper is good at covering money:

> "To me, there are three components of what we want and we don't pull this off very often, we would like to cover the university of ideas ... the university of students ... and the university of money, and that we actually do pretty well, of the three of those, we do that the best, I think, because as a paper we are very good at writing stories about money and how money is spent and who is accountable for it."

Reporters who police also had pet interests and projects. Some looked for evidence of wasteful spending or excessive privileges. For instance, reporters at the *Rocky Mountain News* routinely wrote stories examining the cost of meetings, the budgets of departments, and the salaries of administrators. Some reporters gravitated to stories about injustices, abuses of human rights, and social inequities. They focused on cases of discrimination or harassment. Other reporters were drawn to the nascent efforts of universities and researchers to commercialize their

discoveries and the potential conflicts of interest surrounding these efforts.

Relatively few reporters policed the educational process. If they did, they quantified their evaluations. Teaching is a complex task, one that resists evaluation, and reporters who have called the competence of instructors into question have been successfully sued for libel (Dill, 1986, p. 110-112). Quantifying the educational process into the number of hours spent teaching, students in a class, and classes taught a semester is a much safer and less ambiguous approach to evaluate instructors. It also a method where reporters can do their reporting from their desk and write a story with little knowledge of higher education.

Reporters tactics for policing included accessing documents through public records requests and getting tips and leaks by cultivating a network of news sources within universities. To ensure that university officials were forthcoming about events and developments, they routinely confronted university officials with their back-region information.

Newspapers may assign higher education reporters, investigative reporters, or both to police universities. Each arrangement has tradeoffs. The *Minneapolis Star Tribune* and *San Francisco Examiner* use reporters from investigative teams to police universities. The advantage of this approach is that higher education reporters can focus on university life, consumer concerns, and trends in higher education. The drawback is that investigative reporters are sporadic in their policing. They are like mobile spotlights that never stay focused on any one industry for a very long period of time. Editors at the *Rocky Mountain News, San Francisco Chronicle,* and *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* expect their higher education reporters to police universities. The approach allows for more constant policing but

takes reporters' time away from covering university life, consumer concerns, and trends in higher education. Reporters at the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and *San Francisco Chronicle* tried to strike a balance between policing and other roles. Reporters at the *Rocky Mountain News* focused mostly on policing. The *San Diego Union-Tribune* achieved a unique balance in its coverage by limiting its policing to the hospital and medical labs of the University of California San Diego. A medical reporter scrutinized the back regions of the university hospital, while the higher education reporter focused mostly on the public regions of the main campus.

Reporters and editors provided a long list of reasons for policing public universities. They cited the significant sums of money universities receive from the state, the high salaries that university officials receive, the potential conflicts of interests involving researchers who market their discoveries, public concern regarding rising tuition, excessive privileges and top-heavy administrations, reliance on universities as engines of local economies, and a prevailing sense that governing boards are merely rubber stamps, rather than guardians of the public interest.

At some newspapers, editors and reporters spoke about key incidents that impacted their frame of reference to covering a university. In San Francisco, Minneapolis, and Pittsburgh, editors and reporters mentioned cases of secret retirement packages and reserve funds amounting to millions of dollars. Even though the incidents took place a few years ago, reporters and editors recounted their occurrence to uphold their professional ideology and affirm their practice of policing (Zelizer, 1993).

Editors said their goals in policing universities are no different from their

goals in policing other institutions — universities have just had a free ride. Two editors commented:

"We didn't have an agenda, our agenda is the same as on any beat, the difference is the guy like (our reporter) has been in the business as long as I have, covered a lot of beats, covered a lot of things, and you just take the same attitude of accountability, watchdog, etc. to higher education." Editor, *Rocky Mountain News*

"I wouldn't call them (universities) sacred cows, I think they were not the subject of much investigative reporting ... I just don't think they have been the subject of the classic kind of nut breaking, where you look at city governments, municipalities, when your are talking about fulfilling our roles as watchdogs." Editor, *San Francisco Chronicle*

Because universities have not been subject to the same level of scrutiny as other institutions, reporters and editors seem to view them as stocked ponds of improprieties (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1989). A university news service director, who was formerly a reporter, commented:

"Administrators don't realize how tough the media are on everybody else. Higher education is such a public good, how can you imagine the media being tough on you. There is the natural instinct in the media to bring down the high and mighty. They did it with medicine, they did it with government, and now they are doing it with higher education. We are fresh meat. We are the victims of our own success. If I had a choice of no coverage or the coverage we have now, I would take no coverage."

Reporters disagree as to whether it is appropriate to contact legislators or regents to push for control remedies on the issues they raise. Some regard such efforts as contrary to their belief that reporters should serve as neutral observers (Dunn, 1969). Sometimes neutral reporters cannot anticipate the ramifications of their stories. For example, a *Columbus Dispatch* reporter wrote a story on the six-digit salaries of former presidents who now hold faculty positions at their institutions. While the reporter did not quote legislators or regents in his story, legislators responded by convening hearings on the subject.

Reporters at the *San Francisco Examiner* and *Rocky Mountain News* routinely sought legislators' and regents' reactions to their stories. Reporters at the *Rocky*

Mountain News see themselves as part of the administrative apparatus for reform. One reporter commented:

> "I think reporters always need to be talking with the legislature. Who is going to react? That's state money. Are you going to call the trustees? Yes, but really the boss is the legislature. So you call them and they order the investigation and they change the laws and it all works together."

By contacting regents and legislators, reporters can have a much greater impact on policy outcomes than reporters who do otherwise. In 1994, the *Denver Post* ran a story disclosing that a dean made "secret" deals with department chairs to raise their salaries and reduce their teaching loads. Legislators were not quoted in the story and they did not respond to it. In 1995, a reporter at the *Rocky Mountain News* covered the same issue and contacted legislators for a reaction. The legislators ordered an external audit of the dean's college and the dean eventually announced his retirement.

In rare instances, reporters may uncover improprieties that are not unlawful but are so outrageous that they create a policy window in which legislators enact regulatory legislation to prevent their recurrence (Kingdon, 1984). For instance, stories in the *Rocky Mountain News* revealing that the University of Colorado admitted more out-of-state students than in-state students triggered legislation prohibiting Colorado colleges and universities from engaging in this practice. The legislation was relatively easy to enact because there was near total agreement that something had to be done and the corrective action did not require the expenditure of money, nor the administration of a program (Nelson, 1984; Ripley, 1985).

Window to University Life

"I think my chief goal, I tend to be hit and miss on it, is trying to let readers know what it is like to be a young adult at a university setting, one because a lot of adults have been to colleges before and are inherently interested and want to know what it is like now ... there are people for whom college is a complete mystery and I think part of my job is to help translate that out to them." Reporter, *San Diego Union-Tribune*

Some reporters preferred to see themselves as translators who provided their readers with window to university life. One reporter described this orientation as looking at the university from the bottom up. For example, two reporters at the *San Diego Union Tribune* surveyed dozens of students to profile campus life at six colleges and universities in San Diego. In some instances, reporters provided their readers with tertiary knowledge (i.e., emotional, empathetic) of how students experience college (Ericson, Chan, & Baranek, 1991). They moved into residence halls and attended weekend orientation sessions.

The Politics of Higher Education

"One of the reasons that I included legislators is that I found that interesting. I spent a lot time sort of covering the statewide milieu of higher education, you know, the funding and regulatory environment of it rather than individual institutions." Reporter, St. Paul Pioneer Press

Reporters would frequently cover the actions of universities from the perspective of the larger stage of politics and public culture. They functioned much like a chorus in a Greek drama, commenting to their readers about the performance of universities and interpreting their conduct (Linsky, 1988, p. 207). Their interpretations were based on the compatibility of universities' conduct with the social, economic, and political scene (Burke, 1969; Edelman, 1964). Conduct incompatible with the scene was considered newsworthy because of its potential to trigger shock, anger, anxiety, or suspicion in readers (Edelman, 1964). A higher education reporter commented:

"I wrote this piece that this (university president's) house had been sitting there and then I found out he's been getting all these housing subsidies ... jeeze, this is like peculiar .... this is like amazing and they are paying for the upkeep of his house, there is an empty president's house sitting there ... I said to my editors, 'Jeeze, this seems really odd,' and they said, 'Everybody gets that, that's what everybody gets.' And I was given no encouragement to pursue it and I didn't pursue it. You see what happened, this is where you get a sense for the press to operate on it's own, it's going to have a much more difficult time. We operate in a political, social, and economic climate that is kind of an echo chamber. We write stories that then raise a name; we're out there on own if the political climate isn't such that this resonates. So six months later the California economy is in the doldrums, they were raising fees, then this started coming out. Then our editors were like, 'Yea, go for it. Oh yea, go for it.' They didn't say, 'Go for it,' six months before."

In this study, actors external to the university were part of the scene that reporters covered. They included governors, legislators, and coordinating agencies such as the Ohio Board of Regents and the California Postsecondary Education Commission. They also included special interests groups, like animals rights activists and the Rainbow Coalition, who sought media coverage to pursue their social agenda.

In some cases, reporters' coverage of higher education politics was influenced by their paper's location in the state capitol. Newspapers in state capitols tend to consider state government their franchise. Reporters at the *Sacramento Bee, St. Paul Pioneer Press,* and *Rocky Mountain News* followed legislators' involvement with higher education issues. Even though their newspapers are near the statehouse, reporters at the *Columbus Dispatch* and *Minneapolis Star Tribune* steered clear of legislative matters. In their mind, statehouse reporters were better equipped to cover the capitol. Reporters whose papers were removed the capitol also shied away from legislative matters. The reporter at the *San Diego Union-Tribune* was not expected to cover the legislative activity in Sacramento, and the reporter at the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* had very few opportunities to cover state politics.

Reporters in California covered an independent policy group, the California

Higher Education Policy Center, a privately funded center established to foster a public dialogue on the fate of public higher education in California. Since the Policy Center lacks the authority of a state agency, it has had to come up with inventive ways to attract the attention of the power holders in California higher education. Media coverage has been one solution. The Policy Center releases many of its reports using press conferences and its staff appears on radio programs, meets with editorial boards, and provides quotes to the press.

The Policy Center courts the press for several reasons. The press authenticates the staff of the Policy Center as "authorized knowers" who should have a say on important matters (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1987). The press keeps the issues raised by the Policy Center in front of the general public and lawmakers. Above all, when the press calls university presidents about the Policy Center's reports, presidents may find it difficult to dismiss the reports. The associate director of the Policy Center commented:

> "The presidents of the University of California and California State University would not care about anything in these reports no matter how well written they were if we didn't get press on them, I guarantee that. It's only because of the press, it's only because of the radio show, it's only because of the visibility that they care about these things. But if we were just a nice little center here that put these reports out and only sent them to academics and people who might be interested in reading them, they wouldn't worry about that. It's because that (the media coverage) sort of ups the ante a little bit, it stirs things up, and we wouldn't be getting any attention from the higher education community if we didn't get press."

Trends and Issues

> "The higher education beat is more than a follow-the-money beat." Los Angeles Times Higher Education Reporter

Some reporters thought that an exclusive focus on policing universities was too narrow of an orientation to cover higher education. While most thought that policing was a perfectly acceptable role, they also believed that coverage of higher

education issues and social and cultural issues also deserved coverage.

Higher Education Trends and Issues

"I tend to like issues-oriented stories, like grade inflation, which I think in a way it's like the old saying the real scandal is what is legal. I kind of made that pitch to my editor which is I think is investigative reporting more broadly interpreted." Higher education reporter at a California newspaper

Some reporters focused on trends and issues related to the administration of colleges and universities. They included trend and issues affecting a cross-section of institutions or that an innovative institution exemplified. Reporters looked for trend and issues that would interest, impact, or outrage their readers. They covered topics such as grade inflation, note-taking services, remedial education, privatization in higher education, fundraising by institutions, and requirements that students now own computers.

Most reporters regarded covering higher education trends as important, but the rush of breaking events or editors' expectations that they police pulled them elsewhere. Even under these pressures, reporters undertook efforts to increase their involvement with this role. The higher education reporter at the *Columbus Dispatch* expanded his paper's coverage of trends and issues by packaging wire stories and press releases about regional institutions into a biweekly column. One reporter, who disliked policing, tried to persuade his editor that stories on hidden trends, like rising remedial education rates, that require research to pull together, can have a greater impact on policy than scandals about financial improprieties.

The *Minneapolis Star Tribune* attended to higher education issues by assigning two reporters to the beat. One reporter covered social and cultural issues flaring up on campuses. Higher education issues were covered by the second

reporter, who followed developments related to the University of Minnesota's long range plan. The reporter wrote a well-researched story examining why universities find it so difficult to focus and narrow their priorities. Few, if any, reporters in this study attempted to analyze the functioning of universities in this manner.

Reporters paid scant attention to trends and issues regarding teaching and learning. They raised questions about who should teach. California reporters dealt with the issue of whether convicted junk bond dealer Michael Milken should teach. They raised questions about what should be taught. Colorado reporters asked if ethnic studies is a true academic discipline. They rarely raised questions about what constitutes good teaching, how teaching can be evaluated and improved, or how students should learn.

Most of the stories on teaching were about quirky professors — the professors who do funny things, like stage a funeral in class to teach a lesson about life. Most of the stories on learning involved technological props like computers. The *San Diego Union-Tribune* was the only paper in this study that routinely looked at teaching and learning. The paper ran a biweekly column called "Class Notes," which covered both the quirky and more serious aspects about teaching and learning.

Findings from higher education research were rarely the basis for stories. The lone exceptions were UCLA's annual survey of college freshmen and the American Council of Education's (ACE) annual study of colleges and universities as well as ACE's annual study on minority students' access to college.

- Social and Cultural Trends and Issues

"I would lean more towards features stories or issues stories. They weren't light features. They were about serious issues. It turned into the culture wars on campuses." Reporter, *Minneapolis Star Tribune*

In this role, reporters looked at universities as a microcosm of society's conflicts erupting along the divisions of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and other implicit or explicit distinctions people make in their social relations. The role was most visible in the coverage of one of the higher education reporters at the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*. Her reporting techniques were inventive. She pulled a diverse group of students together to see the film *Higher Learning*, which portrays the culture wars on campus in an extreme manner, and then asked the students to respond to the film in terms of their actual experience in college. She looked at the topic of feminism by recruiting a student intern at her paper to enroll in a class offered by a women's studies department at the University of Minnesota. She interviewed professors who circulated waivers in their classes to protect themselves from students who may be offended by the content of their lectures.

Every reporter in this study dealt with the issues of gender and ethnicity. In many cases, they received calls from student groups, faculty, and even external groups like the Rainbow Coalition, who sought press coverage to push their initiatives. On-campus groups sought the creation of ethnic studies programs and cross-cultural centers and improvements in minority hiring.

Reporters covered a steady stream of events. A group of female students filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education alleging that sexual harassment was widespread at a university. Student groups staged protests and hunger strikes to draw the attention of university officials and the press. Racists

posted anonymous notes and spray painted messages spouting racial hatred. Accreditation groups issued diversity requirements. Regents repealed admissions based on affirmative action. Faculty claimed that they were denied tenure because of their ethnicity.

In some cases, reporters identified with the causes of the ethnic minority students and sought to air their concerns. A reporter commented about his coverage of the causes of ethnic minority students:

"Yes, I think it is important to cover. That may be my bias, but it is very difficult to be a minority student at the university. Although the university recognizes it as a problem and has been working to improve the situation. There are so few minorities there, the ones that come there end up feeling like guinea pigs. I don't get encouragement to cover this one way or another from my editors. I happen to think it is important. The university is an isolated campus and it has an isolating culture and it's particularly true for minority students."

4.3 Factors that Influence Newspapers' Coverage of Universities

This study looked at four spheres of expectations that influence newspapers coverage of public research universities: individual, organizational, professional, and community expectations. The study found that in most cases reporters' role orientations conformed to their editors expectations. Editors expectations were influenced by their professional orientation and by factors such as competition and the ownership of their paper as well as community expectations. Professional expectations influenced how reporters policed universities, not whether they policed universities. Community expectations appear to be mediated by a newspaper's type of ownership (e.g., family ownership, corporate ownership). A summary of the influence of each sphere of expectations follows.

Individual Expectations — Reporters' Role Identities

In most cases, reporter's role orientations conformed to their editors' expectations. Reporters, however, did not simply comply with their editors' expectations. Reporters indicated that when their editors' expectations pointed them toward roles that were at odds with how they see themselves, they would try to redefine their editors' expectations or accommodate their editors' expectations and still pursue the kind of reporting they find satisfying. They applied their knowledge of how the newsroom operates to create an autonomous space for themselves (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1987, p. 349). For instance, one reporter maintained a long list of story ideas to discourage his editor from imposing his ideas on him.

Reporters' role orientations reflected their role identities — their idealized conceptions of themselves, how they like to think of themselves being in their position (McCall &Simmons, 1978). Their role identities can be measured in terms of their sources of satisfaction. Reporters whose principle source of satisfaction related to having an impact were inclined to police universities for internal problems. Conversely, reporters who found satisfaction meeting interesting people were inclined to provide their readers with a window to university life. Their personal bent and talents pointed them away from policing. A reporter at the *Denver Post* commented:

> "Maybe I can be totally wrong but I don't feel my role here depends on coming up with a scandal every week, real or imagined, know what I mean ... eventually I'll do something like that, but that's not my main shtick. With some it just bores me and if it bores me, it's going to bore my readers. Very often, what I'm interested in might be totally out of step with what my editor thinks is important, in fact that's true most of the time, if the truth be known, but you push."

Reporters' history of assignments can be viewed as a manifestation of their

role identities. Each type of reporting assignment emphasizes some skills and dispositions over others. Reporters' role orientations for covering higher education were compatible with skills and dispositions they acquired in prior assignments. Former features reporters were interested in writing stories on issues and trends or stories providing a window to university life. Former state government reporters focused on politics or policing. A higher education reporter at the *Los Angeles Times* commented:

> "I covered the higher education beat with a government beat mentality. I formerly covered state government. Universities are creatures of the state, they receive public funds, and the public has a right to know how they are spent. Yes, I was interested in accountability and I submitted a number of public records requests. I wanted to know how much you spent, why you did it, and why you thought it was a worthwhile expenditure.

Organizational Expectations

At six of the eight newspapers in this study, editors thought the role orientations of their reporters were consistent with their own perspective. At the two newspapers where the editors were dissatisfied, the higher education beat was seen as a low priority. Even though the editors' outlook was different from their reporters', the situation was tolerable because the editors did not want to assign a more valuable reporter to such a low priority beat. While the higher education reporter was not perfect, the editors seemed content having someone who was at least interested in the beat.

How Editors Control Coverage

Editors handle a number of responsibilities ranging from assigning reporters to stories and deciding the angle of stories to editing stories and pitching stories to editors who decide the placement of stories in the paper. In performing their job, editors use a variety of mechanisms to channel reporters toward the kinds of

coverage they want. Reporters regard story placement as the most reliable cue as to whether they are meeting editors' expectations. Front-page coverage is a good sign; inside coverage is not. When reporters exceed editors' expectations, editor pass along compliments. One newspaper sponsors a monthly contest and gives out cash awards. When reporters violate expectations, their stories may be edited and receive poor play. Reporters may also removed from a story and given other assignments. Reporters who dislike the outlook of editors may jump to another paper, while reporters who are content stay on.

Editors are busy people who may have as many as ten reporters assigned to them. Because they are so busy, editors like reporters who can manage their own beat with little supervision. By minimizing supervision, editors realize their reporters' coverage may drift off course from their expectations. As a control measure, they assign reporters to the beat whose background and disposition will result in the coverage they want.

Editors' assignments are constrained by the pool of reporters who are available and interested in the beat. Reporters are generally attracted to high-status beats, like the statehouse and other beats where they cover powerful news sources on matters worthy of front-page coverage. In the main, the higher education beat is not viewed as a high-status beat at the papers in this study, but it is not seen as a graveyard either. While reporters do not flock to the beat, editors indicated that they do find experienced, often very talented, reporters to put on it.

Editors' Priorities for News Coverage of Universities

Editors' priorities related to several considerations that influenced the roles of reporters. These considerations related to breaking events, competition, news

values, news mix, and news balance.

- *Breaking Events*

Editors expect their reporters to attend to major breaking events. If the regents announce a fee increase, their reports need to cover it. Often reporters get caught up in a string of breaking events and their role orientations become less of a factor in story selection. An editor at the *San Francisco Chronicle* commented how breaking events diverted the higher education reporter from his list of story ideas:

"The problem is that there is no time. If you were in a quieter place, a place not so much on the front lines internationally and in a state that had a more stable political environment, if there wasn't so much political news about the institution, you would have time for that, and the reporter would have time, he would do great stuff in that vein, but there simply is not, the events pull him, he's constantly got a bunch of good story ideas, but they are not as urgent as whatever crisis or development or action of the moment is."

- *Competition*

Competition heightens the expectation that reporters stay on top of breaking events. Reporters' role preferences in competitive news markets were skewed toward coming up with exclusives and away from covering less urgent news relating to university life or consumer service. The pressure to upstage the competitor pointed reporters in San Francisco and Denver toward the role of policing. Both the *Rocky Mountain News* and *San Francisco Examiner*, two of the most aggressive papers in this study, are located in two-newspaper towns. A reporter at the *San Francisco Chronicle* spoke about how competition with the *Examiner* and other California newspapers affected his coverage:

"I wanted look at campus life from sort of the bottom ... Yea, I talked with students, that's what I really wanted to do and I didn't do enough of it because what happened was these other scandals then kind of overtook us. One of the things that happened when I had started the beat was this whole indirect cost controversy at Stanford. We were in a competitive position. We had to break stories. You know, one can have all kinds of theories about what motivates journalists and the news of higher ed but ultimately we are motivated by very parochial concerns which is beat the competition."

Circulation wars often compel editors to consider how they want their paper to be different from their competitors. An editor at the *San Francisco Examiner* spoke about the impact of competition at his paper:

"When you are growing you don't have to think a lot, but when you are shrinking you have to think about what's important to the paper ... what you want to do is have an identity, you don't want to have something that is mistaken for something else. Our self image is as an urban, enterprising, innovative paper that can do stories of impact, so you have something everyday that nobody had, something that's good journalism ... It's kind of a mixture of tabloid and investigative stories. We like the OJ trial, at the same time, nine months of a reporter's time goes to look at financial records at the university."

- *News Values*

"The one thing that I always live by is that the news media are in the entertainment business. They are not necessarily in the news business today as much as they are in the entertainment business and so if we are not really making entertaining news for them, is it realistic to believe that they are all of sudden going to turn resources and energy to us? Can we help sell newspapers or get the ratings on the eleven o'clock news? Very difficult, unless we've got some incredible scandal going on and most of the time we try to avoid those." University public relations administrator

As commercial enterprises, newspapers must make a profit to survive. News stories must entertain as well as inform. Editors look for stories that readers will find interesting and readable. Readable stories attract and hold readers' attention because they contain vivid information - information that is emotionally interesting, not dull; that is concrete, not abstract; that involves events, issues, or people near to readers, not distant (Kennamer, 1988).

The need for stories with vivid information predisposes reporters toward certain news values. They may be drawn to stories containing conflict or novelty. To sell their stories to their editors, they may "highlight" their accounts by deleting the routine or expected and "whatever is not sufficiently important, novel, or distinctive" (Gans, 1979, p. 91). A university public relations administrator noted how this inclination affects higher education reporters:

"When they are on the beat, the dominant value seems to be to find something sensational, quirky, or dramatic, if they want to get ahead in the trade. It's partly the mood of the business, it's partly the economics of the business, and it's also the page-1 system, which encourages reporters to look for the hottest news stories."

An editor at the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* commented about the kinds of stories that receive good play at his paper:

"(We're) interested in stories with broad reader appeal, something that people pick up that's going to get a 'whoa' from them, like the cybersex story. You know, it's got everything: high tech and sex and students and a big fight over it. And it's education, you know, it brings to the fore a pretty interesting issue about censorship and the Internet."

A reporter at the *Denver Post* commented about the front-page news values at his paper:

"You don't have to be a rocket scientist to know what buttons to push to titillate the interests of editors: scandals, drugs, sex, gangs, real or imagined gang activity, there's a lot of buttons to push, we are not talking geniuses here, they are easy to see."

To construct vivid news stories, reporters personify events and conditions in terms of the central actors involved and downplay the influence of institutional and political forces (Bennett, 1988; Breed, 1955, Ericson, Baranek, and Chan, 1987). Personification makes stories more interesting because readers can project their emotions to the various actors depicted in reporters' accounts (Bennett, 1988; Kaniss, 1991). A reporter commented about personification:

"What you look for as a reporter is the salient detail, the human illustration of something that will bring it to life for people, and what editors do and I certainly more than most reporters, I sometimes fall into the trap of getting bogged down in the kinds of ins and outs of the bureaucratic, so it's easy to get sucked into that, you have to learn to personalize it when appropriate and to generally step back and draw the broad outlines and not get bogged down in the little details."

Press coverage turns presidents into local "knowns" (Gans, 1979). Keyword searches of the Nexis/Lexis system for mentions of presidents in 1994, found that the president of the University of Colorado was mentioned in the *Rocky Mountain News* in 220 articles and the president of Ohio State University was mentioned in 174 articles of the *Columbus Dispatch*. Even presidents who distanced themselves from the press could not curtail the penchant of reporters to personify institutions. The former chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh was mentioned in 90 articles of the

Pittsburgh Post Gazette from January 1994 through May 1995, even though he rarely spoke with reporters.

Reporters tend to analyze issues in terms of "personalities, rather than institutions comprising a social and cultural system" (Breed, 1955, p. 187). They work from an anti-deterministic perspective suggesting that the "fates and fortunes" of an institution "can be understood in terms of the personal endowments of the leaders in charge" (Chein & Meindl, 1991). Instead of looking at institutional arrangements as a source of problems, reporters tend to find fault with the personal flaws and failings of leaders because such insights are easier to grasp (Bennett, 1988, p. 53). One reporter commented about this tendency:

"You want to know why the president is singled out. Again, it's kind like reducing everything to a sound bite, rather than discussing all the intricacies, the ideas, the fact that the president was making changes that threaten a lot of people, in terms of undergraduate education ... it takes time to explain all this, it's much easier to say well the president has a lousy personality, can't relate to legislators, needs image remaking."

- *Reporting with an Edge*

Editors held different expectations about how much of an attitude reporters should put into their story. They used the word "edge" to describe the provocative part of a reporter's story. A story with an edge may have a note of skepticism, even cynicism. A reporter at the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* commented about what she meant by a story with an edge:

"That means it's just not fluffy kinds of isn't-higher-education-wonderful stories. You'll look for real news issues, real controversies. I did a story once on these internships at Disney World ... It had this light component but it was also about the fact they were giving credit for these student internships where they were like selling hot dogs and things, and so it looked at things with a critical eye. So being able to have both in that. That was a story that had an edge."

Reporters at the *Minneapolis Star Tribune, Rocky Mountain News, San Francisco Chronicle,* and *San Francisco Examiner* wrote stories with an edge. Stories

written by reporters at the *Columbus Dispatch* and *San Diego Union-Tribune* had less of an edge. The word was not a part of the reporters' vocabulary.

- *Inside Baseball*

Editors also held different expectations as to whether reporters should cover squabbles within universities. They used the term "inside baseball" to describe internal matters that are irrelevant to readers' needs and interests.

Newspapers' gauges of what constituted "inside baseball" were calibrated differently. Differences in calibration affected whether newspapers portrayed the actions of universities as coherent or contradictory. At one extreme, the *Columbus Dispatch* regarded most internal disputes at the university as inside baseball and rarely, if ever, reported on them. At the other extreme, the *Rocky Mountain News* routinely covered infighting at the University of Colorado, where faculty and regents debated a number of issues, some of which were newsworthy such as the leadership of the president.

A university official observed that reporters use a corporate model of management to gauge what university actions are inside baseball or constitute signs of disorganization requiring coverage. By using a corporate model of management, the official noted, reporters mistakenly portray conflict in universities as dysfunctional:

> "Reporters think they understand higher education because they have been to college. But what they don't understand is that colleges and universities are meant to be forums for debates, that when debates go on that, unlike corporate America,that doesn't mean something is out of sync. It's not like business where you have top-down management. They focus in on the infighting and see if they can find something that they can elevate to the level of scandal when things are just at the level of a debate.

- *Balance of News*

Editors held different opinions as to whether higher education reporters should recognize the accomplishments of universities. Some were strongly opposed to idea. An editor at the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* commented:

"It has to be really special, it has be really different. You know, our role is not make the university look good, or whatever college you might be representing, it's also not our role to make it look bad either, you make yourself look bad we just report it. I mean we want to talk about the quality of the institution as a factor, we got to keep an eye on it, but how to report quality is not easy, and everybody is looking for press coverage to make themselves look good. Oh my god, they are trying to get grant money, there's all kinds of reasons they want to get press coverage and it's really scary how people try to get it. And, you know, they spend an awful lot of money putting out a lot of crap."

Reporters at the *Columbus Dispatch* and *San Diego Union Tribune* indicated that their editors were receptive to publishing congratulatory stories about higher education, what reporters derogatorily call "puff pieces." Both papers are in one-newspaper towns, and both are locally-owned by families that have supported higher education over the years. An editor at the *Columbus Dispatch* said:

"No question, I think we do that (celebrate the university's successes). The university is very good at selling itself and that's not much of a problem. And, there's a lot of good news that comes out and we look for that balance and we do the same with the city school district, which has its share of problems. I that we are always trying to show both sides and the readers like to see that mix of good and bad."

News Mix

Editors at newspapers like the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* and the *San Diego Union-Tribune* viewed higher education as source for "bright" or "quirky" stories — stories with a wry or humorous edge in contrast to stories about weighty topics, like the economy. Some editors would place these kinds of stories on the front page to lighten up the news mix, and, in doing so, indirectly encourage reporters to write more of these stories.

Professional Expectations

Reporters and editors regard professional conduct as a source of pride. They view their credibility with peers, sources, advertisers, and readers as hinging on their professional conduct. Newspaper coverage that is inaccurate, unbalanced, or unfair can potentially hurt newspaper sales and advertising revenues as well as poison relations with news sources.

Aggressive reporting is not unprofessional. In fact, it is a criterion for journalism awards and a hallmark of outstanding newspapers. In this study, editors who sought to advance the reputation of their newspaper encouraged their higher education reporters to police.

The impulse to police comes from a professional ethos rooted in a utilitarian outlook on organizational life, an outlook in which self-interest is seen as the overriding factor guiding organizational decisions. One reporter commented on this professional ethos:

"Partly, it's a world view, there are some people, many are reporters, I'm probably unusual in this regard, but who really do feel that people in power and institutions are sort of inherently corrupt."

Reporters and editors believe that if the press fails to perform its watchdog role, improprieties will occur unchecked. One editor commented that his paper's failure to police a university resulted in financial abuses:

"Questionable financial practices have been somewhat widespread there. You know, I feel we are responsible for that. I feel that we allowed it to happen because we were not aggressive 15 years ago or 20 years ago in covering it not only as science and medicine but also covering the money and its relation to and responsibility to state taxpayers and state authorities."

Variations in professional outlook affected how newspapers policed universities, not whether they policed. Reporters who were the most mindful of these variations worked for newspapers located in two-newspaper cities, like

Denver and San Francisco. The daily routine of reading their competitor's paper cultivated their professional sensibilities. The reporters who worked at the least aggressive of the two newspapers in each city, the *Denver Post* and *San Francisco Chronicle,* derided the professional outlook of their competitors — the Rocky Mountain News and the San Francisco Examiner, respectively. They objected to what they regarded as their competitors' tendency to overstate events to make them appear as scandals. Combined with their comments and the comments of other reporters and editors, five key areas were identified that distinguished the professional outlook of news personnel.

Good News/Bad News Mix

Most editors felt professionally obligated to not only cover the problems of universities but also their successes. Editors varied tremendously in how they achieved this mix. Some editors expected their higher education reporters to cover the accomplishments of universities. Others held lower expectations for their reporters and rationalized their balance in other ways. For instance, editors at the *Rocky Mountain News* regarded the reporting of their science and medical reporters as a counterweight to the investigative reporting of their higher education reporters.

Threshold of Evidence to Claim Wrongdoing

Some reporters thought they worked from a higher threshold of evidence than their competitor when deciding whether an impropriety occurred at a university. They criticized their competitor for stretching the facts to create the impression of wrongdoing. One reporter commented that his predicament was deciding whether or not to follow the example of his competitor:

"They were doing the same stories over and over again and flogging these and taking little nuggets that we would never regard as a new story and blow it into some big scandal. They flogged this thing so much more than we would have and the question was, 'Do we like sink to their level? Because what they regard as a news story, do we have to come back and do something equally trivial and blow it up? And I have to say to the paper's credit they didn't. They were pretty good about not letting the competition define what is of news value because I think a lot of times some these stories were so parochial you never imagine a really world-class newspaper writing those stories, some of the stories you would have never in a million years seen in the New York Times."

Repeated Use of News Sources to Prompt Enforcement Actions

Some reporters objected to their competitor's efforts to be policy players and protested their custom of seeking quotes from the same set of legislators or regents who would predictably provide a negative reaction to a university's action. One reporter observed:

"The dynamic is that they write a story and they then call two or three perennial critics of the university ... these guys are all friends, and they all say it's an outrage, and the next day the paper says, 'Regents outraged ....' You know, I think that is just bullshit."

Distorted Characterizations of Events and People

The impression reporters give about events or persons is a product of the words that they use to describe them. As a reporter at the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* commented, the words that reporters choose are significant:

"I think the public thinks that these word just are getting thrown up but we do debate. Like even last night, we were debating over whether this was an effort to keep the college *viable* or was it an effort to keep it in the *black* because I went back. (My editor asked) What was your question? What did he say? And we thought in fairness the most accurate way to describe this was to keep it in the black, because it didn't seem that it was fair to paraphrase 'to keep the college viable.' Things like that, it sounds really picky but it does make a big difference because words suggest things. People read between the lines and it's a big difference to a reader seeing a story about a college that is trying to get itself in the black versus a college is trying to be viable, the urgency is a lot different between those two."

Some reporters criticized their competitor for distorting the meaning of events by using language that suggested a scandal where none existed. They were turned off by reporters labeling private meetings as "secret" and pay raises as "big perks." They also disliked what they considered to be lopsided portrayals of

university officials, especially presidents, designed to cast them as villainous or incompetent.

A public relations administrator at the University of California commented that, nowadays, reporters find it easier to write cynically about university officials because they are socially removed from them and rarely encounter them in person. Most of the reporters he knew used the phone, fax machine, and express mail to do their work.

Some reporters indicated that they made a conscious effort to meet with their sources. By doing so, they found that they got more and better stories. They were also convinced that when they looked at a possible case of wrongdoing, they could make a fairer judgment as to whether their source's conduct was or was not appropriate. One reporter commented:

"The issue with the president, for example, I felt I was getting to know him and then it does create, it's more difficult to be writing about someone in a critical fashion whom you know and respect to a certain extent. Once you get to know somebody, you see that they aren't these evil people necessarily, they're human beings, and you got to look them in the face and I think it was probably one of the reasons that we didn't write that story because I thought it wasn't fair to the president and I talked to him and he was very upset that it was raised (by the other paper)."

Crusading: Pushing a Pet Project or Grinding an Ax

Reporters and editors noted that some issues deserve extensive coverage because of public interest or because their impact is significant. They objected to extensive coverage driven by the inferred or expressed wishes of senior editors or publishers to promote a pet project or grind an ax. In this study, reporters and editors discussed examples of both. In one case, reporters believed that a paper was pushing for a president to resign, and in another case, reporters believed that an editor pushed for a president's long-range plan.

When a newspaper crusades, a reporter observed, reporters slant depictions of events and people while still observing journalistic conventions:

"You can almost shape a story by knowing who you are going to call, and you can likely suspect what they are going to tell you. In the process of composition you can further refine, which is what our competitor does, by taking their comments out of context ... You can shape a story by your selection of quotes, by where they run, how high up, obviously you have to both sides, but within that context, you can get your point across."

In the worst-case scenario, a newspaper with an ax to grind can favor critical sources for reactions, rely on weak evidence to claim wrongdoing, and use language to portray events and people unfavorably. One reporter felt that was the case at his newspaper. He commented on his paper's coverage of a university president:

"The coverage was like deliberate things to undermine who she was. It kept referring to this bill of particulars that people had signed against her, ask to see it, there are no particulars, there were no real charges... it was just like this newspaper was going after her."

An editor observed that her paper once pushed for the long-range plan of a university president. Now that her paper has a new executive editor, she felt a crusade could no longer go through:

"His replacement doesn't seem to have the same tendency, so you'd be left to the people who are putting that day's paper together and they are more argumentative. I think they would be raising the right questions: Didn't we just do this? What are you'doing this again? It seems this story has too much attitude, you know coming in light of the last stories we had?"

Crusading appears to be a product of groupthink in the newsroom. The recipe for groupthink includes a highly directive editor whose opinions can become norms, the outcasting of skeptics in the newsroom, and the collective reassurance of in-group members of the rightness of their cause (Janis, 1982).

Community Expectations

Community sentiments about a university and expectations about how a newspaper should cover a university seep into a newspaper through several channels. Reporters hear comments about their coverage firsthand from their news

sources, who may include administrators, students, faculty, and policymakers. They hear and read remarks from their neighbors, friends, and readers who call or write letters. They receive comments their editors who associate with community elites.

Newspapers can take a tremendous amount of heat for covering a university critically. Reporters commented that they received letters and phone calls from irate faculty and alumni, some unsigned disparaging their character. Some felt personally attacked by university officials who called their character and motives into question. In some cases, other newspapers criticized reporters. For example, a business newspaper in San Diego rebuked a reporter at the *San Diego Union-Tribune* for scotching a research deal involving the Scripps Research Institute. The headline of the news story read: "How a crusading reporter lost $100 million."

Because public universities are state institutions with alumni in the statehouse and influential positions statewide, community expectations may be felt even when a newspaper is miles away from a university. An investigative reporter at the *Dallas Morning News* who wrote a series of investigative stories about Texas A&M University (some 180 miles from Dallas) commented:

"Texas A&M is one of the icons of Texas culture. There are many, many powerful people in Texas who are connected with A&M and there is this unwritten norm that Aggies don't criticize other Aggies. The paper took a lot of heat, hundreds of letters, phone calls, subscriptions canceled, and suggestions about lawsuits for running my stories."

Many strings run between newspapers and their community, but the string that runs between community elites and publishers and executive editors has the greatest potential to affect coverage. As opposed to reporters, who are discouraged from socializing with their sources, publishers, executive editors, and their spouses

may have interlocking relationships with community elites. These elites may include elected officials, business leaders, heads of public institutions, and university officials. The influence of community elites is moderated by the level of commitment publishers and executive editors have toward independent journalism. A reporter at the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* commented:

> "I was doing a story on the project on the university hospital which was a very, very tough critique of the size of the hospital .... and the publisher was a member of the board of regents at the same time and he never said one word about what we were doing, totally removed himself. That's another tradition, talk about traditions here: separation between the business and news. The business side has its own interests. We're suppose to be separate and that has been maintained, it's part of the family tradition."

The influence of community elites may be particularly strong if a paper is locally owned by a family rather than owned by an out-of-state corporation. Some reporters who worked at family-owned papers indicated that their publishers viewed their papers more as businesses and less as bastions of independent journalism. A reporter who formerly worked for the *Columbus Dispatch* and now works at an alternative newspaper commented:

> "The business end of the paper comes first. The paper is family property. Its coverage is a booster club megaphone that passes for journalism. The publisher is very powerful and has veto power on many city projects, you definitely do not want to get them mad at you. It's not like the publisher came in and demanded changes or yanked copy. He had an editor who did that for him. They use to have an editor with some journalistic credibility but they got rid of him. The new editor is a publisher's man who reflects the views of the publisher. There was no court of higher appeal under this arrangement."

The higher education reporter at the *Columbus Dispatch* held a different opinion:

> "There is a popular myth in town, held especially by some of the alternative newspapers, that our publisher is standing over all of our shoulders telling us what we should write and what we shouldn't write. Well that is ludicrous. We all have a sense of what is of interest to the publisher but to me it has no influence in what I do. I guess what I'm telling you is that I don't shy away from anything because of any perceived notion about what he wants or doesn't want ... I mean certainly that is what my editors have instructed me to do. You cover your beat and that means if a story pops up, I write about it, and turn it in. If somebody wants to kill it after that, then that is somebody else's responsibility, and so far that hasn't happened."

Black (1982) observed that the owners of watchdogs will not send them after

their friends. A reporter who worked at another family-owned paper found this to be the case:

"Complaints about news coverage have the most impact when the people who are doing the complaining are close to the paper. In this case, it was business associates of the publisher. They felt that I was unduly pessimistic in my accounts. That I was pointing out that the glass was half-empty, not half full. I received support within my section of the paper but I encountered resistance in other areas of the newspaper. When that happens, you may get four stories on a topic when at other paper it's fifteen. The signals you get are based on the play of your stories and allocation of your time - whether you get to run with it full time or they give you six other things to do. That's really how censorship occurs in the newsroom."

Conservative family-owned papers, such as the *Columbus Dispatch* and the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, located in conservative communities were more deferential and praiseworthy in their coverage of universities than newspapers in more liberal communities. The economic impact of the universities may have also contributed to the *Dispatch*'s and *Union-Tribune*'s favorable coverage. Reporters and editors in San Diego and Columbus regard their local research university as a major engine of the economy. A reporter at the *San Diego Union-Tribune* commented about the University of California San Diego (UCSD):

"Yea, it really has had a big impact on the course of the economy here because this area like most places is sort of transitioning out of the whole defense industry mess ... UCSD generally over the years has gotten good coverage because it's been a very serious campus where you can show a real bottom line impact on the community, where you can say this is what UCSD has been doing for us and lot of that for better or worse has come through in our coverage."

The *Rocky Mountain News*'s role of policing universities for inefficiencies and other improprieties was consistent with the political leanings of residents in Colorado. Boulder is considered a liberal enclave in a conservative state where, according to polls, the majority of residents think that state government is inefficient and wasteful, residents are strongly opposed to taxes, and residents believe that government decisions are not made in the best interests of the people (Amole, 1994; Cronin & Loevy, 1993).

4.4 Summary of Influences of Performing Fourth-Estate Role

The relative performance of each newspaper in enacting the fourth-estate (policing) role is summarized in Table 3. The newspapers are listed from left to right from low levels of policing to high levels of policing. Determinations of the relative standing of the newspapers were based on their performance in eight categories ranging from using whistle blowers to filing suits to obtain documents.

Table 3. Newspaper Scrutiny of Internal Affairs of Public Research Universities

Newspaper:	DISP	POST	SDUT	PGAZ	SCHR	MNST	SFEX	RMN
Level of Policing of Universities								
Editors say, 'no' to puff pieces?	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Uses whistle blowers/informants?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sued university for information?	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Submits public records requests?	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Investigative beat or team covers university?	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Uses sources within university to look critically at administration?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Uses lawmakers & other external sources to question university affairs?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Prior media coverage of major financial irregularity	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
	DISP	POST	SDUT	PGAZ	SCHR	MNST	SFEX	RMN
Community Characteristics								
Politically conservative?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Mix	No	No	No	Yes
Newspaper Characteristics								
Out-of-state ownership?	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Most editorials critical of university?	No	No	No	Mix	No	No	Yes	Yes
Competes with another daily newspaper?	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: DISP - *Columbus Dispatch*, POST - *Denver Post*, SDUT - *San Diego Union-Tribune*, PGAZ - *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, SCHR - *San Francisco Chronicle*, MNST - *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, SFEX - *San Francisco Examiner*, RMN - *Rocky Mountain News*.

All the newspapers engaged in some form of policing. While the *Columbus Dispatch* was the least involved in policing, the higher education reporter did write stories on a number of touchy issues. Newspapers like the *Rocky Mountain News* and the *San Francisco Examiner* simply engaged in more policing. They used public records requests, whistle blowers, investigative teams, they used sources within universities other than "official" sources, and they sought the reaction of external authorities.

The differences in coverage between the *Columbus Dispatch* and the *Rocky Mountain News* and the *San Francisco Examiner* illustrate how variations in each sphere of expectations influences coverage. Perhaps the most significant distinction is at the level of organizational expectations. The *Dispatch* is a family-owned paper directed by a publisher who supports Ohio State. In contrast, both the *Rocky Mountain News* and the *San Francisco Examiner* are owned by corporations headquartered outside their state. Editorially both the *News* and *Examiner* have been consistently critical of universities. In addition, both the *News* and *Examiner* are in competitive situations that have pulled them toward policing. Community expectations support the *News's* role of policing universities for inefficiencies and other improprieties. In fact, editors at the *Denver Post* were interested in stepping up their scrutiny of higher education. While Columbus is a politically conservative like much of Colorado, the *Columbus Dispatch* is conservative in a pro-growth sense. Ohio State is the second largest employer in a region with 21,138 wholesale, retail, and service establishments (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1994). Both the

San Francisco Bay Area and Denver are more diverse economically. The San Francisco Bay area has five times as many establishments as Columbus. Denver has almost twice as many.

4.5 Negotiating Press Performance - Regions and Closures

Universities, like all organizations, try to make sure that what becomes known about them publicly is viewed favorably. To do so, they need to keep some matters private. They require privacy for the purposes of confidentiality and deliberation (Bok, 1989). Confidentiality is needed to prevent injuries to innocent people as a result of publicity. Private deliberation is needed because total visibility would disable choice and policy-making (Bok, 1989, p. 174). To avoid arbitrary choices and to make sense of equivocal situations, administrators need to be able work through and discuss a variety of solutions in private before they back some of them in public (Bok, 1989, p. 175).

Under most circumstances, universities work cooperatively with the media but, at the same time, they employ certain preventive mechanisms to control the release of knowledge to suit their purposes. This preventive work is accomplished through the physical, social, and cultural mechanisms of regions and closures, conceived by Ericson, Baranek, and Chan (1989). Since universities share the common goal of maximizing helpful news and minimizing harmful news, their methods of enacting regions and closures are similar. The following section of this paper describes their methods and reporters' reactions to them.

4.5.1. Back-region Enclosure: Secrecy

"To have no capacity for secrecy is to be out of control over how others see one; it leaves one open to coercion." Sissela Bok (1989)

Reporters have access to many places on a university campus since most are open to the public. The higher education reporters visited campuses as much as two or three times a week and as little as once every two weeks. Traffic and mileage were factors for reporters who visited less often. In their visits, reporters found the flyer-plastered hallways of student unions to be one of the best sources for story ideas. In addition to reading the campus newspaper as a tip sheet, some reporters touched based with student reporters at their office and some routinely visited the university media relations office. One reporter commented that he made a habit of dropping in on university administrators unannounced to leave the impression that he was keeping an eye on them.

Access is regulated to some places. Reporters are expected to ask permission to enter research labs as well as other facilities that jeopardize their personal safety or endanger the work taking place. Personal privacy is also an issue. Reporters are expected to seek permission to enter students' living quarters and patients' hospital rooms.

The classroom is a private preserve that is selectively made public to reporters. Reporters are expected to ask the permission of the instructor as a professional courtesy and a safeguard to prevent disruptions to the educational process. Both the university and the press benefit from the perception that the classroom is a private space. By expecting the press to ask permission, the university gains a measure of control. Asking permission means explaining intent. If the intent of the reporter is to cover a controversial issue, the instructor has the option to refuse the request. Reporters benefit from the perception of the classroom

as a private space because their stories can be presented as dramatic expose´s of the actual workings of classrooms. In 1993, one local television station in Minneapolis sent a hidden camera into several of University of Minnesota classrooms to reveal that classes were being taught by teaching assistants. In 1994, the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* hired a student intern to enroll in a women's studies course and write an article about her experience. After the story ran, the faculty filed a complaint with the Minnesota News Council contending that the reporting technique was an invasion of privacy. The paper argued that it was not an invasion of privacy because faculty as public employees are fair game and the paper secured the students' permission to use their comments. On a vote of 14-0, the News Council ruled in favor of the paper.

Universities shield their private culture by limiting access to their meetings. Public sessions of regents or trustee meetings are about the only meetings reporters attend. Some reporters attend meetings open to the campus community, such as faculty senate meetings, but only if they have found them to be newsworthy or good places to develop sources. Some reporters do not attend meetings other than regents or trustee meetings simply because of the daily time pressures of their beat.

Reporters described trustee and regents meetings as tedious but still a good place to develop sources. Several complained that many of the discussions held in the meetings sounded as if they were scripted to reduce conflict and increase certainty. One reporter commented:

"In my state they (trustees) are suppose to conduct their business in public meetings, that's the law, but, you know, nobody is fooling me, they sit there and vote on issues without discussing them. Either they don't care and are not going to discuss it or they discussed it somewhere else."

Some reporters grudgingly conceded that universities should be able to

conduct their business in private. But they presuppose that decisions made in private are different from those made in public sessions (Dunn, 1969). In their mind, private decisions are more likely to abuse the public trust. When the press uncovers an instance where a private decision can be construed as abusing the public trust, the occurrence is particularly newsworthy because it affirms the press's role as guardians against the excesses of secrecy (Dunn, 1969). One reporter commented:

> "I think one of the presumptions of this kind of newspaper is that things done in secret can tend to abuse the public trust, there is a presumption that if they are doing it in secret they might be up to something, it ratchets an event up a level, that they are doing it in a closed session where no one is there as opposed if they did it in a public session and nobody bothered to listen in on them. Know what I mean? The sunshine laws were written in a way so the university has a much greater latitude than a city council, there are multiple exemptions to the public meetings laws that apply to university that don't apply to any other state agency, they have a national security exemption, they have much more leeway on personnel stuff ... they can legally close public meetings on a lot of this stuff where if it was a city council they would have to open it up, it's just the way it is. I can understand it to an extent, you're running a university. It's a different enterprise than the city government. But when they are in there cooking up retirement deals for themselves and figuring out how to spin it and they get busted doing it, it's great they are doing it in secret, because of the story, because it does amp it up some.

Unable to attend most university meetings, reporters rely on their network of sources to provide them with information. The legend of reporters who spent months pouring over documents to uncover wrongdoing is true in some cases, but in almost every case in this study, reporters relied on whistle blowers and anonymous informants to point them in the right direction.

Public relations administrators commented that they actively patrol their university's borders to seal off unnecessary leaks. Some have formed committees consisting of administrators who work in hot spots like campus security, student affairs, and other areas where critical incidents may occur. In their meetings, they develop procedures for responding to incidents and coach administrators on how the press may visualize an incident as bad news. To build a cushion to respond to

incidents, some have set up "early warning" e-mail networks to instantaneously dispatch messages to administrators. One office hires a team of students to monitor campus events.

Often conflicts over secrecy between universities and reporters come down to matters of timing. Universities require privacy to develop plans that they intend to make public at a certain date. Reporters may gain access to plans before their intended release date and subsequently cover them. As one administrator noted, reporters' news values come before administrators' sense of time and place:

"The grey area relates to planning documents because here it is a matter of timing. Those are working documents that you would like to keep out of the public eye until all the kinks have been worked out and the plan has been established. The problem we have had is that some of the documents have been leaked to the reporter. I've tried to convince the reporter to hold off printing some of his stories but he's interested in getting a byline. He uses the excuse that the public has the right to know. I said that's fine but it won't harm the public if he waits a week."

Documents represent another outlet for reporters to gain access to the back regions of universities. By law, public universities must provide certain documents to reporters and other parties that request them. Reporters may request documents directly from the office that retains them. If they encounter resistance, they usually call a public relations administrator who is familiar with their rights to obtain documents. Several public relations administrators underscored the need to minimize the hoops that reporters jump through to obtain documents. One administrator commented:

Generally speaking we try to provide reporters with the information they request without using formal requests. That's a tradition here that my predecessor established. If you provide reporters information, they are more likely to trust you and more likely to listen to you than if they had to use leverage to get it.

Mass-produced reports meant for internal or external distribution are usually provided without hesitation. Requests for internal memos and reports meant for a

limited distribution may be forwarded to a university's legal affairs office, which determines if the reporter needs to file a public records request and is legally entitled to the document. Public records requests may be required in situations where the politics are intense, when reporters ask for a great deal of information, or when reporters ask for documents having to do with personnel matters or attorney-client privileges. Aside from legal interpretations, one editor noted that trust plays a central role in gaining compliance to public records requests:

> "It's not only writing a letter and sending it, it's following up, it's talking with lawyers, it's pressing your case in some more subtle diplomatic ways, winning their trust even if you are about to hammer them .... they (university officials) have gotten very skittish and very gun shy about the press. On the one hand, the university is more willing to be honest but, on the other hand, they want to be able to trust the reporter. If the reporter screws them or gets something wrong, or is malicious, they will shut down. (In this case) the reporter kept their trust all through the process even as he was hammering away at them and that is a real testament to his diplomatic skills and his reporting."

Reporters' level of access to documents directly impacts their ability to perform their work. The contrast between the coverage of the *Rocky Mountain News* and *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* illustrates this point. Editors and reporters at both papers espouse the role of policing public universities for information, yet the role performance of the *Post-Gazette* is hindered due to the quasi-private status of the University of Pittsburgh. By law, the university is only required to provide budget figures on average faculty salaries by department and budget figures for major expenditures of goods and services. Under these restraints, the *Post-Gazette* publishes significantly fewer stories on university expenditures than the *Rocky Mountain News*.

Several of the investigative reporters in this study crossed swords with universities in a battle to gain access to university documents. Most of the battles boiled down to disputes over legal interpretations as to whether documents are

confidential or proprietary information. Many reporters interpreted these battles as delaying tactics. In one case, reporters were investigating a potential case of research fraud and sought access to the personnel file of the researcher. The reporters were entitled to the file if the university had formally disciplined the researcher. The university claimed that the researcher voluntarily accepted all disciplinary actions. The newspaper challenged the claim, sued the university, and gained access to the file.

Reporters expect public universities to respond to their investigations in the same manner as city, county, and state governments and other public institutions that have been on the receiving end of investigative journalism for decades. They observed that university officials are unaccustomed to working with investigative reporters. For example, one reporter found that university officials were unnerved that he would ask when a decision would be made on a matter and then hold them to the date:

"They were shocked when I followed up and called about the status of a decision that they indicated would be made on a certain date. On other beats I've worked on, including cops and transportation, they are not surprised by that at all."

Several reporters found that university officials wanted to exclude themselves from the rules applying to other public institutions. One reporter commented that the questions that he asks public institutions routinely were deemed inappropriate by university officials:

"The universities were not pleased with my reporting. Their response was, 'How dare I raise these questions.' These are unquestionably great institutions but they are also creatures of the state which are so use to being in control and not being asked why. I think higher education reporters get enamored, enmeshed with the higher education rhetoric, but I decided to maintain some distance from the rhetoric and cover higher education just like I would cover any other public institution."

Public relations administrators noted that university officials who are

unaccustomed to aggressive reporting or who feel like they have been burned by the press are often unduly pessimistic about the willingness of the press to be fair. Their impulse may be to avoid embarrassing explanations by quietly correcting problems behind the scenes. But, in doing so, public relations administrators noted they risk even greater embarrassment if a reporter finds out about the problem and implies that the university covered it up. One public relations administrator commented about the administrators he works with:

"I think there is a lot of skepticism about the media all the way across and its makes the job harder because they all have been burned ... they've seen stories that in their view have been inaccurate or that have been distorted the facts or whatever. I think that makes it tougher and luckily here we sort of have a tradition of people working with the media, we got pretty open doors here, they haven't really backed off, but there have come times where I'm in a meeting with the legal counsel and someone else and we have to talk about whether we are talking to the media, you know, those issues come up. How much can you control? What are they going to do with this?"

"Sometimes (going public) comes down to the individual public relations person in a meeting. Where the tide has gone this way, and you know you have to go this way, you just got to stand up for what you think is going to work in the long run. And, sometimes you can turn the tide, sometimes you can have influence, and that's where PR people earn their money because there's always a sense when you enter a crisis, when you have a potential problem, there's always a sense, that let's circle the wagons and everything will work out for us. But it's been our philosophy here, and fortunately I have had the some good cooperation here, that when we get into a problem, we open it up, we say here's what the deal is, here's how we are dealing with it. So, I've been fortunate."

4.5.2. Back-Region Disclosure: Confidence

"I think it's quite different from the corporate world. It's a horizontal structure, rather than a top-down hierarchy. You have your shared governance. And because people are either tenured or members of unions, they don't have to be fearful of speaking up. »I do get calls, especially in regards to discrimination suits. If I get enough calls, I'll pursue the story." California higher education reporter

Universities are porous organizations that seep out knowledge. The porosity of their boundaries is a result of a number of factors including their:

- Immense scale - universities employ between 10,000 and 20,000 people occupying dozens of buildings.
- Decentralized structure - organizational units within universities are independent and, in some cases, financially autonomous.

- Weak administrative controls - presidents lead by consensus, not fiat. Faculty loyalty is conditional, many faculty have closer allegiances to their profession than their institution. Faculty with tenure may criticize their university with minimal risk of penalty. Even the support of administrators is tentative, as they come to identify more with their profession than their institution (Muller, 1994).

- Politics - Universities are political entities composed of competing interest groups, each jockeying to advance its agenda (Baldrige, 1980). Interest groups may exist along the traditional lines of departments or students, administration, and faculty. However, as universities increasingly reflect the composition of the society that surrounds them, the formation of interest groups has become more fluid and issue-specific, cutting across gender, ethnicity, social class, as well as traditional lines (Meyerson & Martin, 1987).

Given the attributes of universities, control of knowledge is always elusive. Universities are vulnerable to leaks of knowledge that have not been screened through official channels. In this study, universities located near newspapers that policed for improprieties were especially vulnerable to leaks. One public relations administrator commented:

"Universities leak like colanders. I've said it a 100 times when I spoke to groups, if you don't remember anything else I said this morning, remember this: if you don't want to see it on the front page of the newspaper, don't say it. That's the way universities are, that's one of the reasons why we are having trouble dealing with this change in the media."

Competition among opposing interest groups often results in leaks to the press. Sources within the university may disclose information to the press to discredit their opponents (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1989). At one university, for example, trustees who lost confidence in the chancellor's leadership leaked reports highlighting internal problems at the university. After the press covered the reports, the trustees pointed to the news stories as evidence to back their claims that the chancellor's leadership was ineffective.

If a city has two newspapers, informants will leak to the paper they believe

will do them the most good. In Denver, the coverage of the *Denver Post* was more favorably disposed toward the president of the University of Colorado than the coverage of the *Rocky Mountain News*. Supporters of the president leaked to the *Denver Post* and detractors leaked to the *Rocky Mountain News*.

While some informers leak to advance their agenda, other informers, the reporters noted, leak because they believe that publicity is their only avenue to correct a wrong. One reporter commented about an audio tape of a private meeting of university presidents that was leaked to him:

"We can speculate on motives but my assumption always was that the news source was grossed out. Basically, there's an amount of personal exposure going to the press on something. This source had personal exposure. I think that the content of the conversation put him over the top, that this was bad. That's why we got the opportunity to do this story - somebody got grossed out."

Still, others leak simply because they have a grudge and want to settle the score. An investigative reporter at the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* found ax-grinders to be the best source:

"There are lot of animosities at any institution as big as a university, people are denied promotions, people are squeezed out arbitrarily, and so forth, they love to tell you what's going on ... we started cold on this story, we just developed sources by reading court cases and university tenure proceedings and so forth, finding people who were obviously wronged or felt they were wronged and went to them and they became sources that led us to other sources and, you know, we began to develop a network of people."

Early in the stages of covering a university, investigative reporters would write a hard-hitting story to send a message to would-be informers that they could expect a receptive hearing. In response to such a story, informers would call and send letters. Reporters would screen the informers and rule out those who were flaky, unable to substantiate their accusations, or talked about internal squabbles of little interest to readers.

Leaks are unsettling to university officials not only because they reveal

internal problems and conflict but also because they suggest that employees have little faith that problems can be resolved through internal avenues. One public relations administrator ruefully observed that faculty and administrators at her university tended to leak to the press rather than work out problems internally. She felt that leaking to the press was disloyal and needlessly alarms the public.

Since universities are porous institutions, public relations administrators face the predicament of whether to remain tight-lipped about back-region activity and risk the possibility that reporters will use unofficial sources — news sources who are not considered spokespersons — to get their news. If unofficial sources gain access to reporters, their perspective may overshadow those of university officials and cast the university in an unfavorable light. As a safeguard, public relations administrators may disclose confidences about back-region activities. If a rumor is milling around campus, they may contact reporters to confirm or disconfirm it and supply the details. In doing so, they may prevent reporters from misconstruing events and gain a more sympathetic hearing. They may also gain the trust of reporters. One public relations administrator commented,:

"It was not uncommon for the reporter to call me and say, 'I understand that one of your faculty may be involved in a sexual harassment suit. Tell me about that.' And, I'd say, 'Oh yes, we've been sitting on this thing.' And, frankly, with time our interaction became very friendly because I knew that he would do a fair job. So when he hit me up with things that the administration was trying to keep low key, I would just be frank, 'Well, that's absolutely right, what do you know?' And, we can reach an agreement and work it from there. And ultimately, that worked very nicely and we could get a much fairer presentation."

In such a symbiotic relationship, the equivocal nature of news is reduced. Reporters receives tips and a deeper understanding of how the university works. In exchange, administrators gain the assurance that their university will be represented fairly.

4.5.3. Front-Region Enclosure: Censorship

"The presumption is that it's better to have control than lose control." Public relations administrator

As part of publicity, censorship relates to the strategies and tactics organizations use to enclose on the knowledge they decide to make public (Ericson, Baranek, and Chan, 1989, p. 383). Public relations administrators commented that in instances where they believe an internal matter will leak out and the news media will treat it as a problem, they advise university officials to go public on the matter. Public disclosure of knowledge related to matters concerning safety, such as a rape on campus, are not debated. But a grey area exists for other matters. One public relations administrator commented:

"Yes, it's (releasing bad news) is a tactical situation and we are never all in agreement about doing it. We negotiate and then reach a consensus. About two-thirds of what goes into it is looking at whether the matter will become public. If we think it might, then we have to consider whether we want one reporter finding out about it and then writing a half-baked, rumor-laden story and then see the story rehashed over a period of time as every reporter writes his or her own version of it as opposed to getting everything out at once and inserting our take on it."

The administrators gave several reasons for disclosing knowledge, in particular bad news. It permits their university to be seen as taking care of its problems and discourages a corrective response from legislators. It abbreviates coverage. If a reporter gets a story after considerable digging, the story in all likelihood will receive major play. It allows administrators to target the release of the news to the reporter they believe will give the university the most sympathetic treatment.

Public relations administrators use a number of tactics to control the disclosure of knowledge, including precisely worded news releases, designated spokespersons, and carefully scripted public announcements. Before disclosing knowledge, they noted, decisions must be made as to what combination of

disclosure tactics will be used and how the disclosure will be timed. If the disclosure is merely packaged as a news release and sent out with little fanfare, reporters may interpret it as a cover-up and take credit for its unveiling.

In disclosing knowledge, the goal of the university, as any organization, is to provide a unitary account and to demonstrate coherence, certainty, and consensus (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1989). Public relations administrators used a variety of techniques to decrease the likelihood of university officials issuing conflicting accounts. Some used e-mail to dispatch copies of news releases to a network of administrators. Some distributed backgrounders — fact sheets about an issue — to administrators.

In most cases, the public relations administrators preferred to have administrators and faculty most knowledgeable about an issue designated as spokespersons. The approach, they noted, has several advantages. It gives reporters what they want. Reporters want to speak with first-hand sources, not public relations administrators. It helps their university to patrol its borders more closely. The discomfort of the idea of being a spokesperson, compels administrators to be more proactive in patrolling their areas for issues. Lastly, it gives their university a measure of control. Once the word gets out that spokespersons have been designated to an issue, others are less likely to speak up. The operating principle is to be open, yet maintain control. One public relations administrator commented:

"One of things that dictates how you are covered is how you treat the higher education reporters and any other reporters that come to your door, and one of the things that we've tried to do here was to make the university fairly transparent for people covering it, that is, if you are doing story on x,y, or z issue, our role is put you in touch with the person who knows about x,y, and z, not to stand in front of your camera and be the spokesperson for the institution ... Certainly, that doesn't mean that we don't help those people that we put out there by giving them some media training and helping them to feel comfortable, helping them to feel in control of the interview."

The administrators observed that faculty, administrators, and office workers are not restricted from speaking to the press. While office workers may speak freely with the press, reporters prefer to speak with sources in charge and rarely use office workers for quotes. Some reporters, however, cultivate office workers as inside sources of information. One reporter commented:

"A good secretary is better than an administrator any day. They tell me what the other reporters are up to. They tell me what's going on campus — of course, this is all off the record."

Administrators and faculty may decide not to speak with reporters. This happened at two universities in this study. In one case, the chancellor of a university never allowed a reporter to interview him. In the second case, administrators from several departments of a university refused to speak with a reporter. In both cases, the reporters observed that the unreasonable restrictions undermined their interest in pursuing the "good-news" stories pitched by the public relations offices.

For universities, the control of accounts is always partial and problematic. While silence or prepared responses are the custom within the bureaucratic ranks, tenured faculty and students are not bridled by administrative authority. Faculty can challenge the best laid plans of administrators. One public relations administrator noted:

"There's really no stigma for faculty to criticize the administration, perhaps, there is for criticizing your own department. A non-tenure faculty member definitely wouldn't. Faculty as a whole treasure their independence, they have no compunction about speaking to the press about the administration."

Newspapers in this study covered two basic types of conflicts between faculty and administrators: those originating as result of a decision by administrators and those originating because of inaction by administrators. A classic example of the

first type was the move by the former president of San Diego State University to send layoff notices to 111 tenured professors in anticipation of a reduction in state funding. Examples of the second type include faculty who pushed for the creation of an ethnic studies program and a cross-cultural center. Whether a conflict is newsworthy or not depends on the magnitude of the conflict and the gauge that a newspaper uses to determine whether a conflict is "inside baseball" or not.

A university's location and the characteristics of its students mediate the ability of university officials to enclose on knowledge. The difference between the University of California San Diego (UCSD) and San Diego State University (SDSU) provides a good example. With its campus boxed in by a residential community and its brainy students saddled with demanding coursework, UCSD is a quiet, serious campus. In contrast, the SDSU campus spills into an urban section of San Diego, which has more of a lively college-town feel to it. A public relations administrator at SDSU commented:

"The things that people do trigger stories at our university. Whether it's students drinking, someone who gets shot, or some other incident. This is campus with 28,000 students and 4,000 employees. We have an intertwined relationship with the community and we have a journalism program. When journalism students hear about something going on campus, they pass the information along to the media outlets where they are interning. News doesn't leak out at UCSD as quickly. And by the time it does, it's old news."

To achieve enclosure on the release of knowledge, universities construct barriers at the cultural level in the form customs and traditions of how, when, and where reporters obtain information. As one reporter commented, reporters may unwittingly accept these customs and traditions:

"And I think for so long in certainly in California there was this very polite relationship between UC and the press ... totally deferential .... they were like these ... they had the regents meeting and they would give out these packets of information like a week to ten days before the regents meetings and so it was just a gentleman's agreement that you wouldn't report on this stuff until the meeting. And then often there was so much happening at these regents meetings so you couldn't focus on one item. So when I started this, I had this ... I said, 'Well, why don't you just let me know when the packet is

ready to pick up and I will actually come and pick up the package.' So I would go over there and they were like, 'No, we'll mail it to you.' And, I said, 'No, I'll pick it up.' .... And I was amazed because this was like a gold mine, I mean there was all this material sitting in these packets."

At the social level, academics may effect enclosure, unwittingly or intentionally, in their conversations with reporters. The language of academics can be intimidating to reporters. One reporter commented:

"I've been in the business for 18 years and I feel confident and comfortable covering anything, I go to the legislature, city hall, the cop beat, court hearings, etc., etc. I've done that, it's real easy, you go over to a place like the university and interview a chemistry professor or a chemistry researcher or whatever biotechnology and it's a whole language, it's a whole thing, it's very intimidating. The learning curve is steep, no question, so you want somebody I think who has experience."

A reporter who holds a doctorate degree noted that his degree discouraged his sources from casting him into a deferential role:

"Covering higher education this (Ph.D.) came in handy because you could see people would try to pull rank, these professors are very full of themselves for the most part, and here's this little reporter comes in and 'I'm the professor of the university' and there were times that I had to insert into the conversation, well, mention that I got my Ph.D., and they were like, 'Oh, well I guess maybe you're sort of one of us.' It changed the dynamic. So I thought I could talk to these people on their level, nor was I tremendously intimidated by them."

4.5.4. Front-Region Disclosure: Publicity

"The lifeblood of a university is publicity .... A university may be the best in the world in terms of its education, research, and faculty, but if no one hears about them other than by word of mouth, the university will suffer" Richard Cyert (1992), President Emeritus, Carnegie-Mellon University.

Newspapers provide society with a "daily of barometer of the knowledge structure of society"(Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1991). Their coverage registers the hierarchy of authorized knowers in society. As factories of knowledge, universities seek publicity to confirm their place in this hierarchy. Resource dependencies fuel these efforts. Publicity is important for obtaining financial resources such as donations and tuition, social resources such as public support, and symbolic resources such as prestige.

Publicity serves a worthwhile social function. Universities issue new releases on a variety of socially beneficial topics including health, commerce, agriculture and others.

The staff of pubic relations offices in this study varied from ten to twenty-four employees. A typical office has writers who, much like reporters, are assigned to different beats. One writer may be assigned to the business school, another to engineering, and so on. In short, their responsibility is to produce news releases that read like newspaper articles and pitch them to reporters.

Most offices have writers who prepare releases about their university. The writers may prepare releases on topics like campus life, academic and support programs, and administrative matters. Writers may selectively focus on topics where their university is trying to shore up its public image. For instance, a writer may pitch a release about a professor's involvement in undergraduate education. The writers typically pitch their releases to higher education reporters but they also send them to other reporters.

The higher education reporters in this study were receptive to receiving releases and pitches from public relations offices. Their level of interest varied with their role orientation. The reporters who were geared toward consumer concerns, university life, and cultural issues were the most receptive. Reporters who worked at papers that seldom ran good-news stories were the least receptive. For lazy reporters, a well-crafted release on an interesting topic is always welcome. One reporter commented:

"Maybe reporters are lazy sometimes. A polished news release and a good organization can get you lots of coverage. A place like Stanford, they have a very elaborate news bureau system and they just churn out news releases and they are very good."

Universities are successful at garnering publicity because of their ability to create suitable news (Gans, 1979, p. 119). With the resources to hire former reporters with considerable recipe knowledge of the newsmaking craft, universities are capable of issuing news releases that appeal to reporters' sense of newsworthiness. Some universities hire their writers directly from their local newspaper in order to close the social and cultural gap between the two organizations. One university even hired a former managing editor of its local newspaper.

Most reporters were amazed by the amount of material that colleges and universities sent them. One reporter described his desk as an "educational landfill." Some reporters said that the volume of mail they receive is so great they trash their mail from out-of-state colleges and universities without opening it.

Reporters regarded most of their public relations counterparts as highly professional. They respected public relations administrators who returned their calls, responded to their inquiries, and lined up sources even when they were working on stories that the administrators did not like. However, some publicity techniques disenchanted reporters. One reporter commented that writers peddled good-news stories to him in the least imaginable contexts, even when the chancellor announced his resignation. Another reporter described how a university tried to pressured him to write a good-news story:

"I get pitches almost every week for positive features about things that were going on up there. Some of them would be interesting, but it got to the point where I was telling them 'no' more and more, with greater and greater frequency ... They started pitching this idea of doing a story on a freshmen success program. And it just so happened that I had other things to do that prevented me from getting involved in a big project ... They (the university) lobbied at least two education editors to have them tell me to do the story. They lobbied the other higher education reporter. The president of the university mentioned it to the senior editors, he might have even brought up to the executive editor's wife. At this point, with that much pressure, I'm probably the last person who should write it because I'm going to go in and I'm going to look for negative stuff."

Reporters who policed for improprieties used publicity not as a source of good-news stories but as a source for visualizing disorder. They would screen releases to find those that were inconsistent with the political, economic, and social scene. A *Rocky Mountain News* reporter, for instance, received a release announcing the award of an eight-month paid leave to a senior administrator who planned to study Aristotle and Shakespeare for a teaching assignment. By inserting the paid-leave against a backdrop of limited state resources, the reporter sparked a reaction from legislators and a decision by the university to abolish its practice of paid-leaves for senior administrators.

Public relations administrators may advise their university to publicize bad news in order to call attention to their plight and appeal for resources to remedy the situation. For instance, one university released bad news on the deleterious impact of state budget cuts. A public relations administrator commented:

"That sort of grew out of a general sense among our friends in the statehouse that they were cutting and cutting the university but we were not bleeding and we had this big risky situation because if we went out and said we are dead on our feet, then that creates all kinds of problems for faculty recruitment, student recruitment, and money recruitment because people give money to a winning team. However, there was this deafening silence ... Our feeling was that he (the chancellor) needed to make a strong stand. They were also in this mode of cutting the budget but not allowing us to increase student fees, so giving us no where to go. So we orchestrated this press conference and my own feeling about this was that we had an opportunity to cast the university in the underdog role and that was what we were really aiming to do against the big state bureaucracy."

Many public relations administrators report directly to the office of the president. They function as advisors to presidents, ensuring that they are reviewed favorably in the press. A public relations administrator noted:

"You want your CEO to be looked on as a good guy or a good girl and so part of your role is to try to position this person in the best possible light and a lot of it has to do with the person and their own values and their own abilities and some of it has to do with where you put them, when you put them, and what you have them say, and our chancellor has enjoyed media coverage."

Several public relations administrators sought to minimize their reliance on

the press by developing programs to reach key constituencies directly. One public relations administrator commented:

> "If I spent all my time and resources dealing with the news media, I wouldn't be serving my institution in a public relations sense very well at all ... If I'm going to be evaluated on that (media coverage), then I ain't going to make it. It is just not going to work because I'm not going to tell my key audiences my message through the news media. I'd be dead meat."

Some universities have instituted speakers' bureaus and outreach programs to get faculty and senior administrators into outlying communities. Some have developed publications they send directly to external constituents. At one university, when public relations administrators learn that an unfavorable story is going to appear in the newspaper, they write a letter with their version of the facts and send it to a core group of alumni, legislators, and donors.

5. Implications of Findings

The research method imposes several caveats on the findings. While the study relied on multiple interviews and newspaper articles to cross-check accounts, it did not include participant observation to verify that interviewees act as they say they do. The study involved a relatively small sample of six public research universities and eight metropolitan newspapers. Therefore, generalizations about universities or newspapers beyond the sample are ill-advised. The universities in this study are unique because they are located within thirty miles of a metropolitan newspaper. Of the thirty-two public universities belonging to the Association of American Universities, fifteen are located within thirty miles of a newspaper with a readership over 250,000. One might suspect that universities outside the readership area of metropolitan newspapers are subject to less policing than the universities in this study because smaller newspapers often lack the money, time, and staff to

police institutions (Gladney, 1990).

The findings from the study connect with two bodies of research: (1) research on the state-level policy formation processes in higher education (Aper, 1990; Crosson, 1984; Hearn & Griswold, 1994); and research on organizational theory, in particular, organizational adaptation, interpretive strategies, and impression management (Chaffee, 1984; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Ginzel, Kramer, & Sutton, 1992; Neumann, 1989, 1995).

From a policy perspective, this study found significant variations in newspapers' role performance as policy actors and agents of social control. The results underscore the point that press coverage is not a mirror image of reality. Rather, press coverage is a partial representation of reality based on the press's construction of it (Tuchman, 1978).

The press constructs reality through it selection of news sources. In this study, some newspapers' construction of reality was partial to the meanings and interests of university officials. The *Columbus Dispatch* portrayed Ohio State University as orderly, coherent, and certain by limiting its use of news sources to official sources within the university. The image constructed was stable and consistent even though the *Dispatch* neighbors the state capitol and has access to legislators who could upset this image. In other cases, newspapers' construction of reality was contrary to the meanings and interests of university officials. The *Rocky Mountain News* constructed an image of the University of Colorado as disorganized and unpredictable by using official and unofficial sources within the university. On many occasions reporters would hold up this image before regents and legislators who would mobilize efforts to establish order.

The press may effect control without involving external authorities such as legislators. Simply by their repeated incursions into the back regions of universities, reporters impose themselves on universities. Their stories provide a significant ordering stimulus for universities. They may expose disorder and violations of expectations and effect control through the stigmatizing effects of their accounts (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1989). Their inquiries may accelerate the speed with which a university gives attention to a matter (Dunn, 1969). For instance, University of Minnesota officials acknowledged that press coverage of the sale of an unapproved transplant drug at the university quickened its response to correct the matter.

The social-control effects of the press are visible in how reporters portray the authority of university officials, in particular, presidents (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1987). As well-placed gatekeepers to a major sector of the public arena, reporters have considerable influence in underscoring the credibility of university officials (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1987, 1989). Reporters may champion or contest the credibility of university officials and the rightness of what they are doing. The potential consequences of not taking the media seriously can be devastating to the credibility of university officials. A president who stepped down following a media feeding frenzy over renovations to the president's mansion echoed this point:

"If there was a fault in my public persona, it was in not being sufficiently overwhelmed by attacks in the media. Overwhelming as it was, there was a sense that things could go on. This turned out to be a mistake. My reaction to it wasn't sufficient. Perhaps, I should have treated it more seriously." (Peck, 1994)

Findings from this study suggest that institutional incentives and constraints within the newspaper industry encourage reporters to police for improprieties rather than cover policy issues. By uncovering improprieties, reporters can take

credit for their unveiling, upstage their competitors, and effect control remedies. Policy issues, on the other hand, exist for every reporter to cover. Reporters, for example, cannot take credit for recognizing high minority student attrition rates. Coverage of policy issues is unlikely to stimulate remedies. While laws may delineate an impropriety as wrong, the criteria of right and wrong is debatable with policy issues. Furthermore, policy issues require resources, programs, and systemic changes to be addressed.

Reporters' work routines direct them toward policing and away from policy issues. Reporters must invest scarce time and energy to research policy issues like minority student attrition or remedial education. In addition, they must rely on expert sources to explain the cause of the issues. In contrast, reporters require little knowledge of higher education or outside assistance to uncover improprieties, just a sense of right and wrong and a reporter's nose for news.

Exceptions exist to the dynamic of policing before policy coverage. The role of affirmative action in admissions decisions is a policy issue that has received a great deal of attention by the California press. But, unlike many policy issues, it is a socially divisive issue and laden with conflict. When policy issues take on these characteristics, they attract press coverage.

Finally, policing by reporters can result in policy responses that are beneficial to universities rather than punitive. Newspapers, such as the *Boston Globe* and *Newsday*, have published stories revealing inadequacies at public universities that prompted an increase in appropriations in one case and a reduction of budget cuts in another (Freeland, 1992, P. 318, National Awards for Education Reporting, 1993).

Organizational Adaptation and Impression Management

An extensive body of research has examined how university leaders employ interpretative strategies to create the desired perceptions of their institution to guide it through difficult times (Chaffee, 1984; Neumann, 1989, 1995). The interpretive model views members of the university community as self-interested participants who associate with the university to fulfill their own aims, not collective ends (Chaffee, 1984, p. 213). To gain their support, university leaders spend time interpreting events and situations so that others are more likely to see matters as they do (Birnbaum, 1991, p. 168). However, such efforts may not meet with success. University leaders operate in an interpretive dynamic, where faculty, administrators, students, and trustees may regard their interpretations as contrary to their aims (Tierney, 1989). They may put forth their own interpretations of matters that conflict with the interpretations of university leaders.

This study has added to our stock of knowledge of the interpretive dynamics within universities. It has shown that faculty, administrators, and other actors may recruit reporters as participants in their interpretive conflicts. If their influence on campus is relatively weak, they may seek out reporters to endorse their version of reality. If they want to erode the credibility of university leaders, they may approach reporters to expand conflicts into the public arena. They instigate press coverage by luring reporters with inside scoops. In this study, trustees provided a reporter a copy of an internal report highlighting problems at the university. In another case, a reporter was leaked copies of letters detailing "secret" deals between a dean and department chairs. Once the detractors of university leaders succeeded

in getting their version of reality covered in the press, they treated the press coverage as a mirror reflecting the mismanagement of university leaders.

University leaders are expected to create a public face of their university as coherent, consistent, and certain, otherwise confidence in their leadership will erode. This study has shown that construction of the public face of universities is always partial and problematic. A university's public face represents a collaborative social construction among university leaders and actors inside and outside the university (Ginzel, Kramer, & Sutton, 1992).

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